

FW: OpEd Submission from US EPA : Clearer Protections for Clean Water Support a Strong Farm Economy

Thursday, June 18, 2015 2:53 PM

Subject	FW: OpEd Submission from US EPA : Clearer Protections for Clean Water Support a Strong Farm Economy
From	Deegan, Dave
To	Grantham, Nancy; Melanson, Kate; Perkins, Stephen; Moraff, Kenneth; LeClair, Jacqueline; Spalding, Curt; Szaro, Deb
Cc	Loop, Travis; Senn, John; R1-Press-Gov
Sent	Wednesday, March 26, 2014 3:21 PM

We've sent the Ag OPED to 114 contacts on our targeted regional Ag Outreach list.

Will keep everyone posted if/when we see any pickup.

Dave

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**From:** US EPA, New England Region [<mailto:pradmin@vocus.com>]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 26, 2014 3:19 PM  
**To:** Deegan, Dave  
**Subject:** OpEd Submission from US EPA : Clearer Protections for Clean Water Support a Strong Farm Economy



## Clearer Protections for Clean Water Support a Strong Farm Economy By EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy

Yesterday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), is taking action to protect the precious waters and natural resources that sustain our way of life.

Water is the lifeblood of American agriculture. The 1930s taught us that enduring lesson. Fueled by historic drought and dryness, the Dust Bowl in the "dirty thirties" plagued the Great Plains and devastated crops and livelihoods. The threat to clean, usable water came to a tipping point in the late 60s and early 70s, when water pollution was so dense, a river in Ohio caught fire.

That's why, in 1972, Congress passed the Clean Water Act to protect our rivers, lakes, streams, and

wetlands. For more than four decades, the Clean Water Act has safeguarded drinkable water and unspoiled places to hunt, fish, swim, and play. The law didn't just defend the mighty Mississippi or our Great Lakes; it also protected the smaller streams and wetlands that weave together a vast, interconnected system. It recognized that healthy families and farms downstream are beholden to healthy headwaters upstream.

Incredibly, one in three Americans can thank those seasonal, rain-dependent, headwater streams for delivering clean water to drink. From manufacturing and outdoor recreation to farming the fuel, food, and fiber that feed our nation—water is critical to every sector of our economy, accounting for billions in economic productivity.

Unfortunately, over the last decade, the Clean Water Act has been bogged down by confusion. Two complex court decisions narrowed legal protections and muddled everyone's understanding of what waters are—or are not—covered under the law. Protections have been especially confusing for those smaller, interconnected streams and wetlands.

That's why our action is so important. Based on sound science and the law, we're proposing a Clean Water Act rule that clarifies which waters are protected—with an eye toward those vital waters upstream.

Some in the agricultural community might think that this rule will broaden the reach of EPA regulations—but that's simply not the case. Our proposed rule will not add to or expand the scope of waters historically protected under the Clean Water Act. It will not regulate groundwater or tile drainage systems; and it will not increase regulation of ditches (whether they are irrigation or drainage).

By working arm in arm with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), we made sure we're addressing farmers' concerns up front. The rule keeps intact existing Clean Water Act exemptions for agricultural activities that farmers count on. But it doesn't stop there—it does more for farmers by actually expanding those exemptions. We worked with USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service and USACE to exempt 53 additional conservation practices. These practices are familiar to many farmers, who know their benefits to business, the land, and water resources. Conservation is an all-around win.

The bottom line is this: before the rule—producers were uncertain whether they needed certain types of permits (for discharges of dredged or fill material). After the rule—if producers choose to partake in any of the 53 conservation practices detailed in the proposal—they won't need those permits or pre-approval.

We've come a long way since the Dust Bowl—but from Midwestern cornfields to avocados on the coast, recent record-setting droughts have been trampling crops nationwide. Our farmers' hardships serve as a stark reminder of the importance of water management and clean water protection.

That's why we need your advice to get this rule right. We're holding discussions around the country and gathering input to help shape the final rule. Visit [www.epa.gov/uswaters](http://www.epa.gov/uswaters) to learn more about our proposal and the Clean Water Act.

When President Obama traveled to Fresno, CA to tour a farm hard hit by devastating drought, he acknowledged that although we may not all agree on everything—we can all at least agree that “we can't keep on doing business as usual.” Drought resilience and relief go hand in hand with safeguarding our precious water supplies. That's the goal of this proposed rule: to make Clean Water Act protections clearer; to bolster a strong agricultural economy; and to live up to the high bar set by America's original conservationists and environmental stewards—our farmers and ranchers.

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